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MINNESOTA ARCHAEOLOGY INC MINNEAPOLIS D A BIRK

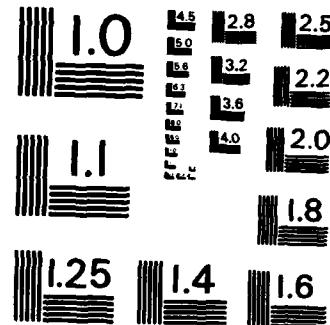
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THE CONTINUING SEARCH FOR 21GD88,  
A SUSPECTED FRENCH-PERIOD FORT SITE  
ON PRAIRIE ISLAND, GOODHUE COUNTY, MINNESOTA

THE INSTITUTE FOR MINNESOTA ARCHAEOLOGY  
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS  
NUMBER 5

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25 June 1985

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## ABSTRACT

In 1885, archaeologist Theodore Lewis mapped the remains of 21GD88, an "old palisaded work" on Prairie Island near Red Wing, Minnesota. Lewis' description led many scholars to believe that he had found the site of an early French trading center that was guessed to be either Pierre Le Sueur's 1695 post or Paul Marin's 1750's Fort La Jonquiere. Despite the obvious importance of such a discovery, and the detail of Lewis' observations, no one has ever duplicated his find. The site of the "old palisaded work" is lost and continues to elude archaeologists. This report summarizes ongoing efforts by the Institute for Minnesota Archaeology to relocate 21GD88 and assess the extent of French presence on Prairie Island.

### French\_Forts\_and\_the\_Upham\_Locus

In the 100 years before 1760, French explorers and traders entered the Upper Mississippi Valley and built a series of temporary colonial forts among the Dakota Indians. Written records suggest that several French outposts were established on Isle Pelee, the "bald" or Prairie Island near present day Red Wing, Minnesota. Despite a lingering local interest and the concern of historians and archaeologists, none of these suspected fort sites has been positively identified.

Recent research by the Institute for Minnesota Archaeology (IMA) reveals that, in the past century, no less than five locations on Prairie Island have been suggested as the sites of early French forts. Three of the locations are on the east side of the island on the bank of Sturgeon Lake (Figure 1). These three are within a half-mile stretch of shoreline and have occasionally been confused in oral and written accounts. A fourth site is less than a mile south of Sturgeon Lake on the edge of an old backwater channel known as the "Ringstrom." A fifth site is hinted on the north end of the island three or four miles upstream. All of these sites may be on property owned or controlled by the St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers.

In 1982, the IMA began archival and field research in an attempt to relocate, date and identify the alleged Sturgeon Lake posts. The following year an IMA survey team relocated what has been called the Upham Locus of site 21GD75. Site 21GD75--the 75th archaeological site recorded in Goodhue County, Minnesota--is a group of prehistoric mounds on the shore of Sturgeon Lake. In 1901, Warren Upham, the Secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society,

found what he believed to be the remains of Pierre Le Sueur's 1695 outpost next to Mound Three of this group in Government Lot 4, Section 32, T114N-R15W (Figure 1). Upham's discovery was made after a farmer turned up pieces of burned clay and other debris with his plow. Several archaeologists later contradicted Upham by concluding that these materials marked either the remains of an old Dakota earthlodge or a prehistoric pottery manufactory. IMA excavations in 1984 determined that Upham's Locus is probably the site of a ca. 1810-1840 Indian or Metis cabin (Birk 1984).

The rediscovery and analysis of the Upham Locus produced an unexpected wealth of information. It "restored" the identity of a modest early 19th Century habitation site that escaped mention in oral and written histories. Knowing that the Upham Locus is not related to the French Regime removes one site from the list of five possible island fort locations argued over in the past. The Upham Locus is now also recognized as inappropriate fare for future discussions of possible prehistoric "potkilns" or earthlodge sites in Minnesota. Finally, the Upham Locus assumes a new and significant role as a landmark that might help find another alleged French fort located nearby, that is, site 21GD88.

#### Lewis and the "Lost" Fort

Theodore H. Lewis was a surveyor-archaeologist who mapped hundreds of archaeological sites in the Midwest between 1881 and 1895. His field work was generally precise and dependable, qualities now embraced as measures of his personal, devotion and sacrifice. Lewis was primarily concerned with mapping prehistoric Indian mounds and paid little attention to habitation areas and artifacts. Nonetheless, Lewis left several pieces of evidence that relate to possible early French activities at Sturgeon Lake. When considered together, this evidence suggests that a French fort may be located just southeast of the Upham Locus.

The first bit of information left by Lewis is in a letter written on October 17, 1885. On the 16th, Lewis began mapping the mounds of 21GD75. He started with "Mound One," the largest and southern-most mound of this group, an imposing feature measuring 80 feet across and eight feet high. Mound One is the only mound Lewis recorded in Government Lot 5, Section 32, on the west side of Sturgeon Lake. In his letter Lewis referred to the large mound in Lot 5 and said that someone told him that formerly there were old stone chimneys "near it." He promised his

employer, Alfred Hill, that he would later "hunt up these stones" to see what they looked like (Lewis Papers, Minnesota Historical Society).

On October 24, Lewis returned to Sturgeon Lake and completed his map of the 21GD75 mounds. At the same time he left the most compelling evidence for French presence on the shore of Sturgeon Lake in the form of a sketch map accompanied by explanatory notes. Lewis visited the old stone chimneys in Government Lot 3 and mapped the remains of a rectangular fort complex measuring 80 by 110 feet. Three sides of the enclosure were formed by a compact series of buildings. The fourth side, facing Sturgeon Lake, consisted of a linear palisade depression with a central gap marking a gateway. According to Lewis' notes, the site was situated "on a high bank near a mound" and the rocks from the old fireplaces and foundations were being hauled away by local residents. At least some of the enclosure was under cultivation. The plow turned up wrought iron nails and two silver crosses. Lewis' diggings uncovered an unmarked iron trade axe. Years later this "old palisaded work" was given the site number 21GD88 by the State Archaeologist.

The Lewis record of 21GD88 is notable for its detail, yet remarkable for its brevity and omissions. The map, for example, shows nine buildings of symmetrical design and placement, but lacks a north arrow. The notes tell that the old palisaded work is "near a mound," but do not suggest which mound or which direction the fort is from the mound. His use of the term "near" as the sole indication of the distance between the fort and the mound is also frustrating. Is "near" ten feet, 100 feet, or one-quarter mile? In his initial survey Lewis also failed to make value judgements about the age, ethnic origin or function of the palisaded fort. His opinion that the site is the remains of Le Sueur's 1695 post was shaped sometime later for reasons yet unknown. Finally, there are inconsistencies in Lewis' accounts of the number of buildings present within the palisaded work. His 1885 map shows nine structures of two sizes, while his notes discuss the remains of only "3 or 4" old buildings.

The last piece of evidence left by Lewis was in reaction to Upham's work. Upham, it will be recalled, found burnt clay in the cultivated field near Mound Three in the Spring of 1901. In his enthusiasm, Upham announced to the press that he and his fellow explorers had discovered Le Sueur's post. Lewis' response was immediate. He refuted Upham's statements to a newspaper reporter and identified Upham's burnt clay samples as parts of a hearth or building left by prehistoric peoples. "Le Sueur's fort," Lewis

maintained, "is located farther up the island, a few hundred feet from where Secretary Upham made his excavations." (Anonymous 1901)

#### The Lewis Evidence in Review

Theodore Lewis disappeared from the Minnesota scene about 1905 and was last heard of in Colorado in 1911. He made no other known reference to 21GD88, nor did he further publicize his findings or conclusions. Curiously, his "old palisaded work" was not included in Newton Winchell's monumental volume on *The Aborigines of Minnesota*, even though Upham's Locus was discussed at some length (Winchell 1911:150, 450-51). One reason for this apparent oversight may be the work of Jacob Brower, an opinionated lawyer-turned-archaeologist, who, in his twilight years, was often at odds with Upham and Lewis. In 1902, Brower attacked Upham's views regarding the origin of his site locus. He also undermined Lewis' declaration by proclaiming that, at Sturgeon Lake, there are "no visible indications of any fort or station built here by Le Sueur or any other french trader." (Brower 1902) Brower died in 1905 and Lewis made no known response to his allegations. Thereafter the location and possible significance of 21GD88 were quietly forgotten.

In 1906 or 1907, newlyweds Walter Antoine ("Tony") and Edith Kuhns moved a small house from Nininger, Minnesota, to Prairie Island, recontoured Mound One into a rectangular platform, and placed their house on top. About the same time they built a small barn, corn crib and chicken coop on the lakeshore east of the mound. The area around Mound One served as a farmyard, pasture and cultivated field until the early 1940's. More recently the shoreline was subdivided as residential and summer cabin property.

In retrospect, it can be said that all known evidence about 21GD88 originated with Lewis. His references to the site over a 16 year period all place it on the west shore of Sturgeon Lake in an area where it is easily confused with other alleged French fort sites. The inevitable chaos can best be resolved by a careful weighing of the facts:

First, there is the surveyed location. Lewis placed 21GD88 in Government Lot 5 (SW1/4 SE1/4) of Section 32. Upham's Locus is situated about 225 feet north of the quarter-quarter section line in Government Lot 4 (NE1/4 SW1/4 and NW1/4 SE1/4) Section 32 and is now known to post-date the French Regime. The Boat Landing, traditionally endorsed by modern islanders as the only site representing

possible French presence in this vicinity, is south of Lot 5 in the adjacent township. Its location near the outlet of Sturgeon Lake is too far removed to be confused with 21GD88 on the basis of legal description.

21GD88 was said to be "on a high bank" on the shore of Sturgeon Lake. Lifelong residents say the bank in Lot 5 used to be steeper or more "cliff-like" in appearance than it is today. Field observation shows that the west shore of the lake in Section 32 becomes more elevated towards the south. That is, the bank in Lot 5 is higher than in Lot 4.

In his writings, Lewis placed 21GD88 "near a mound" or near "a large" mound. The only prehistoric mound recorded in Lot 5 is Mound One, the largest mound in group 21GD75. 21GD75 was mapped by Lewis at the same time that he mapped 21GD88. In October, 1885, only Mound One and part of the fort site were said to be under cultivation, further suggesting their proximity. The large size of Mound One makes it an imposing feature on the landscape and a logical reference point for anyone recording archaeological information nearby.

Finally, in 1901, Lewis said that 21GD88 was just "a few hundred feet" from the Upham Locus in a direction that he termed "up the island." In this case, "up the island" cannot be interpreted as northward or upstream, as any movement along that course would take one onto lower ground and away from the area of Lot 5. As Lewis' remarks were made in St. Paul, in a location both north of and upstream from Prairie Island, there is reason to believe that he was simply indicating a location farther away or outward from St. Paul. What he apparently meant in today's vernacular was what most people would now call "down the island." That is, in a direction southeastward or downstream from the Upham Locus along the shore of Sturgeon Lake. Mound One lies just 500 feet southeast of the Upham Locus and about 125 feet south of the quarter-quarter section line separating Lots 4 and 5. To "go a few hundred feet" southeastward from the Upham Locus would place 21GD88 somewhere very near Mound One where Lewis' other observations suggested it was. In contrast, the alleged Boat Landing Site is about 2400 feet southeast of the Upham Locus in a different township and in an area devoid of prehistoric mounds.

#### The Spring 1985 Investigations

The IMA's Prairie Island research conducted in the Spring of 1985 concentrated on learning more about 21GD88

and the Boat Landing Site through informant interviews, archival studies, surface observations and shovel testing. On June 10, the author renewed contacts with the Prairie Island Indian Community and landowners in the suspected site area around Mound One. On June 13 the author returned to the island with field assistant Diana Mitchell and spent five days interviewing islanders and conducting field investigations.

The surface surveys included a walkover of the shoreline and floodplain east of the public boat landing, an inspection of ca. 1/5-mile of shoreline in Lot 5 (centering on Mound One), and observation of the cultivated mounds comprising the north end of group 21GD75.

The informant interviews were helpful though none of the persons queried had any first-hand knowledge of French fort remains on Prairie Island. All agreed that the only French-period site they had ever heard mentioned was located about where the boat landing is now (in the NE1/4 NE1/4 Section 5 T113N-R15W). Some believe the alleged French site in that vicinity was inundated after the construction of Lock and Dam No.3. No informant had any knowledge of the Upham Locus, Lewis' 21GD88, Brower's L-shaped mound, or a possible fort site alleged to be on the north end of the island.

The interviews included extensive visits with Blanche Kuhns Mowry and Lucille Kuhns Sabaski, two daughters of Walter and Edith Kuhns, who were born in the house on Mound One sometime before WWI. Although the ladies had never seen or heard of 21GD88, they had several old family photographs that showed the original house and the various early outbuildings. The photographs show that the barn, chicken coop, and corn crib that were originally built on the shore east of Mound One were moved to the west-northwest sometime between 1923 and 1926.

Shovel testing was hampered by high winds and rainy weather. The tests were confined to the front yards of the Knoll, Lindemoen and Nance properties in the vicinity of Mound One in Government Lot 5. A total of 31 shovel tests were placed in two transects paralleling the shoreline (Figure 2). A measured interval of 5 meters was maintained between tests and transects except in areas where trees or other obstacles were encountered. Individual tests ranged from 38-40cm in diameter and 38-60cm in depth. The soils in the survey area are generally compacted and difficult to penetrate with a shovel. The soil stratigraphy is typically an A-Horizon of black sandy loam overlying a brown or dark brown sand mixed with heavy gravel. Rocks are uncommon to

this area of the island. All displaced soils were passed through a No.3 screen to assist in the recovery of artifacts.

#### Survey Results and Recommendations

The IMA's Spring 1985 investigations were designed to learn more about possible French presence on the southeast side of Prairie Island. Surveys, interviews and archival studies focused on discovering the elusive site of 21GD88, first mentioned by Theodore Lewis 100 years ago. Secondary targets under consideration are the alleged French fort site at the Boat Landing and the L-shaped mound farther south. Despite lengthy interviews, shoreline surveys, and shovel testing, no French period artifacts were seen or found.

Shovel testing along the shore of Sturgeon Lake in the area of Mound One recovered a large quantity of post-1900 debris probably from the early out-buildings and farming activities of the Kuhns family (Table 1). Part of an old barn footing was observed between shovel tests five and six (Figure 2) and much of the modern debris was centered on this remnant of concrete foundation.

A scattering of prehistoric stone flakes and debitage was found in shovel tests one and 25 just south of where "Bear," the Knoll's family coon dog, is chained. Four meters west-southwest of shovel test 24 a large chert flake was surface collected from near the base of a large tree. Another locus of prehistoric lithic materials was revealed in shovel tests 14 and 15, straight east of Mound One (Table 1).

Shovel test 28 exposed a bed of fist-sized cobbles at a depth of 15-32cm below grade. Most of the rock in this stratum showed evidence of heat-fracturing or charring. Ash and charcoal were not observed. The base of the cobbles appeared to sit directly on top of the brown sand and gravel subsoil. In association with these rocks was found a chert core at ca. 20cm and a possible flake from this core directly below at 32cm. A second chert flake was found above this probable prehistoric hearth (Feature 1) at a depth of about 6cm. To assist later rediscovery of this feature and help judge the extent of shovel test disturbance, the displaced rocks were reburied in a newspaper along with a flattened aluminum soft drink can. The small size of the hearth stones, the lack of ash, charcoal and historic artifacts, and the presence of prehistoric lithics suggest that Feature 1 is unrelated to French presence.

It is recommended that the search for 21GD88 and the IMA's investigations into the whereabouts of other alleged French fort sites on Prairie Island continue. Ongoing research suggests that Lewis' "old palisaded work" must be very close to Mound One and the area shovel tested in 1985. There is still a strong probability that 21GD88 is on property owned by the U.S.Army Corps of Engineers. For the survey to continue, the IMA will need to appeal to the Corps for additional financial support, and, after October 20, 1985, for an extension of the Antiquities Permit to conduct archaeological research on Corps of Engineers' fee title property.

Future studies should include more archival research into early newspapers and correspondence relating to the activities of Brower, Upham, Lewis and others on Prairie Island. The files of the Anthropology Department at the University of Minnesota should be carefully searched and the process of interviewing islanders should continue. Remote sensing technology should be considered for possible application in areas around Mound One where landowners are reluctant to allow wholesale shovel testing. Magnetic or resistivity equipment might work well in areas not too disturbed or cluttered by the remains of old farm buildings. If 21GD88 can be found it could well prove to be only the third French fort ever discovered in Minnesota. Such a discovery would be of immense importance to our understanding of the early history of the state.

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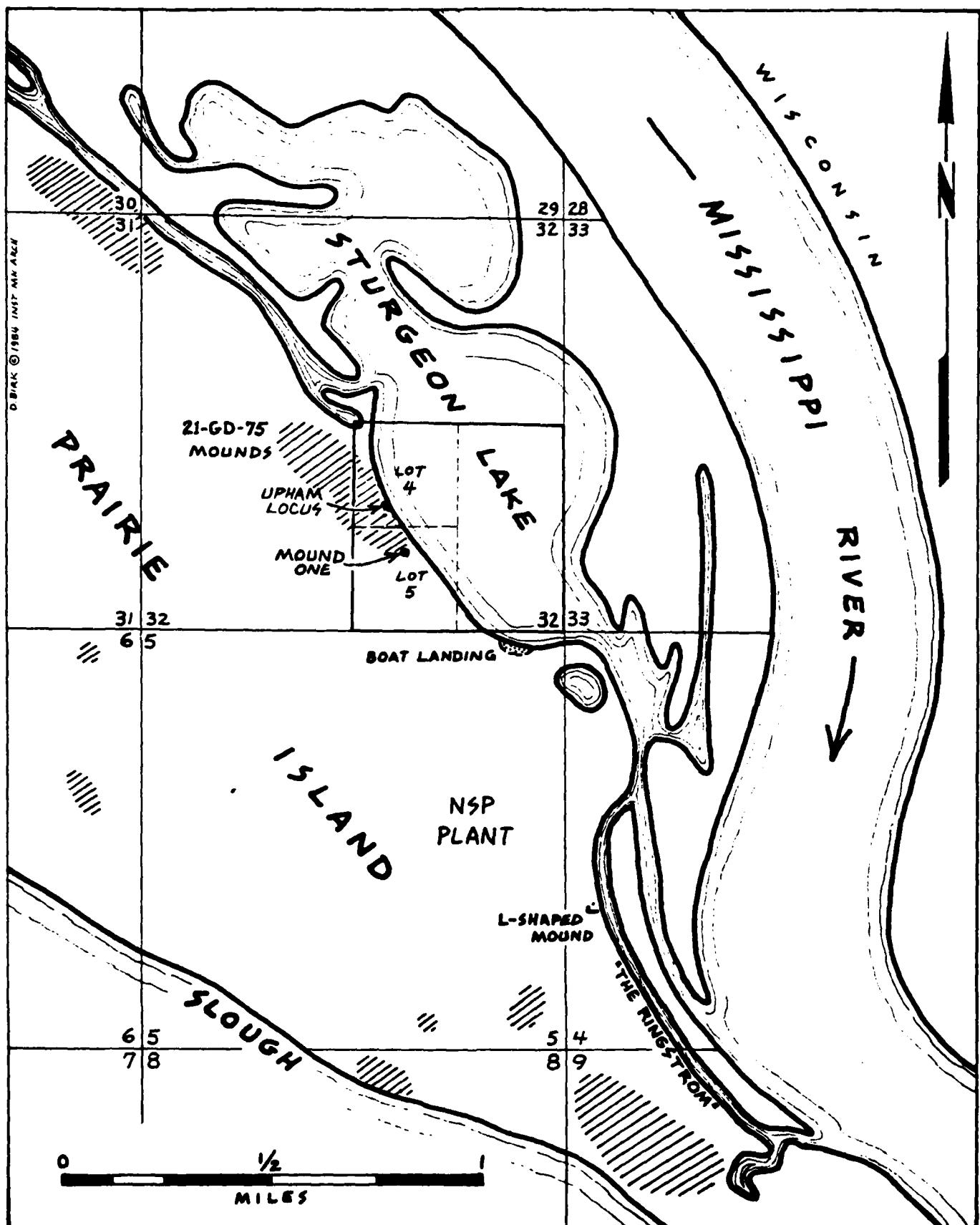
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**Figure 1.** A map of known archaeological properties on the south end of Prairie Island. The location of the L-shaped mound is conjectural.

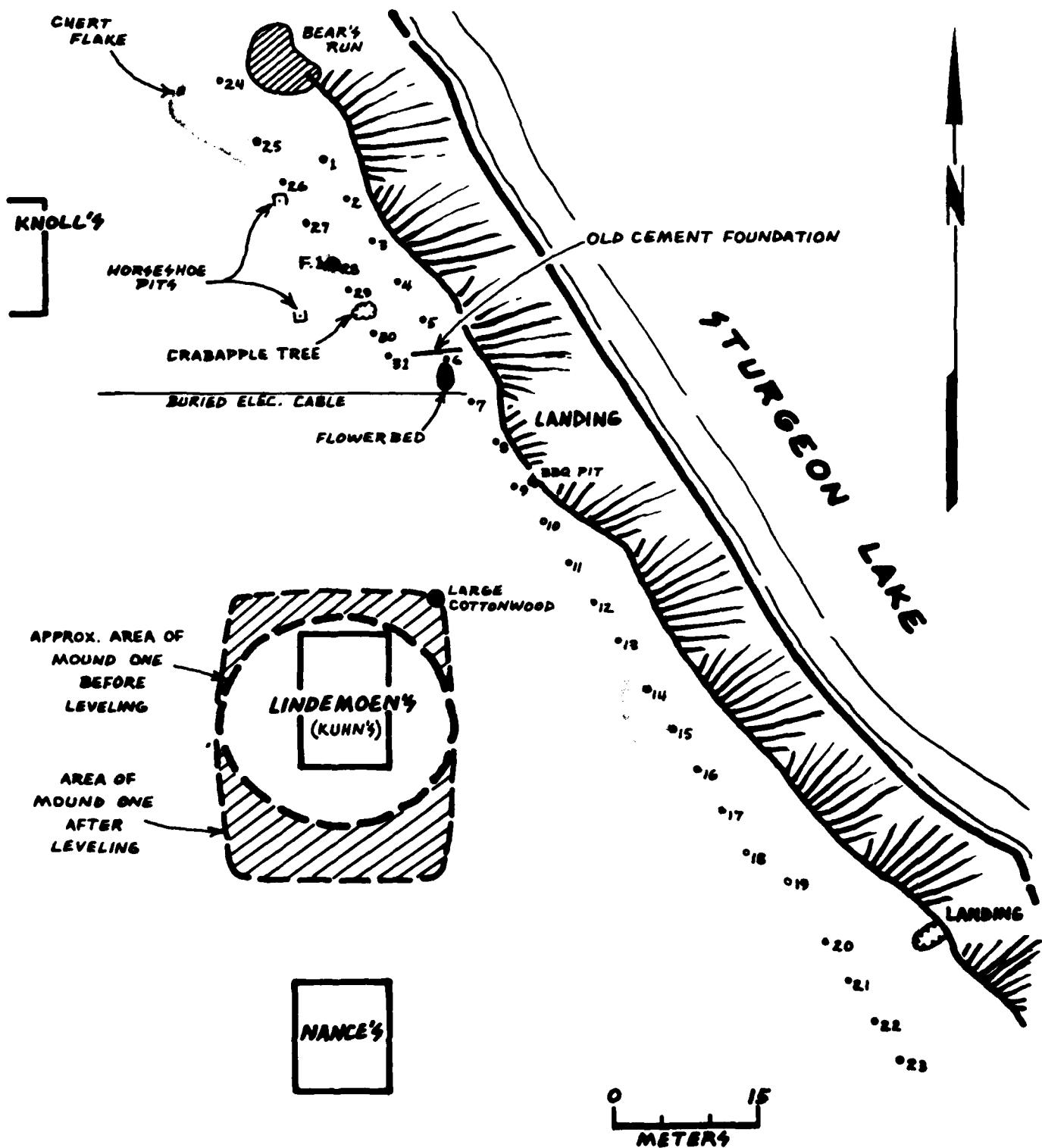


Figure 2. A map of the shoreline area near Mound One surveyed in the Spring of 1985. Positive shovel tests appear as black dots. Shaded areas, such as around shovel tests 14-15, indicate possible concentrations of prehistoric lithics.

Table 1. Prairie Island 1985 Shovel Test List. Note that positive shovel tests are marked with an asterisk. For location of tests see Figure 1.

Shovel Test	Depth of A-Horz	Depth of Test	Comments
Here begin shovel testing in Bob Knoll's front yard, ca. 10m S. of the end of "Bear's" chain and 4m back from the edge of the bank. Proceed SE at measured 5m intervals.			
*1	45cm	55cm	0-40cm: 2 pc. tarpaper roofing, 1 pc. glass thermos liner, 1 pc. iron wire (discard); 3 pc. heat-spalled chert.
2	45	50	Sterile.
*3	30	50	0-35cm: 2 pc. slag (?) (discard).
*4	30	55	0-35cm: 1 modern leather grommet (discard); 3 pc. slag (?).
*5	30	50	0-45cm: 2 wire nails, 1 machine-cut square nail, 1 fence staple, 1 pc. iron wire, 1 pc. scrap iron, 2 pc. beveled iron ring, 1 metal pen point marked "14KT GOLD PLATE" 3 pc. dried leather, 2 pc. bone marrow (discard).
*6	30	45	15cm: pc. iron wire (discard).
*7	35	48	0-40cm: 3 wire nails, 2 pc. window glass, 1 pc. phonograph recording cylinder (?), 3 pc. crystallized tar (discard).
*8	30	45	17-23cm: ash layer w/modern debris. 8 wire nails of various sizes, 1 galvanized roofing nail, 4 small machine-cut nails, 2 small machine-cut nails w/slip-on washer-like heads, 1 pc. iron wire, 1 metal overall button marked "IRVINE ROCKFORD," 1 small buckle, 2 pc. aluminum foil, 1 metal bootlace hook, 1 pc. plate glass, 1 pc. burned porcelain (bowl?), 1 pc. burned whiteware plate (discard).

ST9 was placed 1m SW of its transect position to avoid an old cement block barbecue.

*9	30	50	0-30cm: 2 pc. iron wire, 3 pc. brown (beer?) bottle glass, 1 pc. cellophane (discard).
10	27	50	Sterile.
*11	32	50	0-15cm: 1 modern clip-style woman's hairpin, 1 roofing nail (discard).
*12	40	54	0-15cm: 1 wire nail, 1 slotted wood screw (discard).
*13	35	50	0-15cm: 1 pc. milk glass, 1 small bone fragment (discard).

Here go 6m to ST14 to avoid trailer in Lindemoen's yard.

*14	35	50	0-25cm: 2 chert flakes (1 oolitic).
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Here go 5m to ST15.

*15	35	50	0-35cm: 2 pc. wire nail, 1 crimped metal bottle cap (discard). 1 chert flake.
*16	40	50	10-20cm: 1 wire nail, 1 pc. mammal bone (discard).

ST17 placed on immediate N. edge of slight depression.

*17	32	50	0-20cm: 1 crimped metal bottle cap, 23 pc. window glass, several small pcs. tarpaper (discard).
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ST18 placed on S. edge of depression.

18	32	50	Sterile.
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To avoid trees on line between the Nance and Lindemoen lots, continued transect 2m closer to lake, then proceeded 5m SE to ST19.

*19	35	40	Hit tree roots. 25cm: 1 flake.
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Here go 7.5m SE to avoid trees.

20 34 45 Sterile.

Here go 5m to ST21.

21 23 45 Sterile.

22 20 42 Sterile.

\*23 53 60 ca. 30cm: 2 pc. clay pigeon

Here start second transect west of "Bear's" run and proceed SE paralleling first transect 5m to the SW.

24 -- 55 Sterile.

Here surface collect 1 large oolitic chert flake 4m WSW of ST24.

\*25 26 55 5cm: 1 large modern metal sod cutting blade (discard). 20cm: 1 chert flake.

Here place ST26 ca. 2m N of pin of N horseshoe pit.

\*26 -- 50 20cm: pc. modern bottle glass (discard).

\*27 -- 53 0-10cm: 2 pc. sawn bone, 1 rimfire .22 cartridge (discard).

\*28 -- 34 15-32cm: Feature 1 (see page 8).

Here go 3.5m SE to ST29 to avoid crabapple tree.

\*29 20 38 ca. 5cm: 1 rimfire .22 cartridge (discard).

Here go 5m SE to ST30.

\*30 30 40 0-20cm: 1 pc. window glass, 1 pc. tarpaper, 1 wire paint bucket bail (discard).

Here go 3m SE to ST31.

\*31 30 48 0-15cm: 3 wire nails, 1 pc. tarpaper, 2 small pc. bone (discard).

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